

# Lamentations 1

## Introduction

*Merriam-Webster 10<sup>th</sup>:*

lament (vb) – to mourn aloud, to wail, to express sorrow or mourning, to regret strongly

lament (n): a crying out in grief, wailing, dirge, elegy, complaint

lamentable (adj): what is to be regretted or lamented, deplorable, expressing grief

Lamentations – a poetic book on the fall of Jerusalem in canonical Jewish and Christian scriptures

*Lamentations* has been called the least-quoted book today

-It is buried down between two massive Old Testament books: *Jeremiah* (52 chapters) and *Ezekiel* (48 chapters)

## Authorship

-Just about all conservative Old Testament scholars believe that Jeremiah wrote the book

-We know that Jeremiah wrote "lamentations" about the death of Josiah (*2 Chron. 35.24-25*)

-There is a long note in the Septuagint under the title of the book that it was written by Jeremiah

-Jeremiah also fits as the author, since he survived the fall of Jerusalem (a rare occurrence)

-The book was obviously written by someone after the fall of Jerusalem (586 BC)

-Most of our English translations put Jeremiah's name under the title of the book

## Setting

-The fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC – this was the most horrendous event in the history of the Jewish people

-**What was the importance of Jerusalem to the Jewish people?** It was their capital city and the city where Melchizedek was a priest in the days of Abraham in 1900 BC (See *Gen. 14.18*)

-It was the city of David, the city of Solomon's temple (that replaced the Tabernacle)

The fall of Jerusalem is described in three places in the Bible: *2 Kings 25*, *2 Chron. 36*, and *Jer. 39* – **Read 2 Kings 25.1-21**

-What the prophets had been saying had actually happened

-The Babylonians took the Ark of the Covenant (and it disappeared until *Rev. 11.19*)

**Read Psalm 137** – written from Babylon by the survivors of the fall of Jerusalem

## Structure of the book

-Acrostic in form

*Chapters 1-2* – 22 verses in each chapter – each verse has 3 lines – the first line of each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet

-*Chapter 3* – 66 verses – groups of 32 verses – every line in that 3 verse group begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet

-Chapter 4 – 22 verses – each verse has 2 lines – the first line of each verse begins with that letter of the Hebrew alphabet

-Chapter 5 – 22 verses – each verse has 1 line – no acrostic

**What was the value of writing a book like this in acrostic (poetry) form?** It made it easier for the people to memorize the book (especially people in captivity)

-it gave Jeremiah restraint (like Shakespeare's iambic pentameter)

It is hard for us to understand the tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, but imagine Washington, D.C., existing for 1500 years and then being destroyed by a foreign enemy

-The Jews were not free politically again until 1947

**What was the purpose of the writing of the book?** To express to God their sorrow over what had happened, and in *Chapter 5* to pray to God to help them

**Do we offer "lamentations" to God today?** Yes, many times in our grief, we just want to tell God how much we are suffering

Song: Does Jesus Care?

Song: I Must Tell Jesus

## **Lamentations 1.1-7**

**V1** – **Where were all the people of Jerusalem?** Dead or on the way to Babylon as slaves

-**When were the slaves freed in Babylon?** *Daniel 5* – 539 BC – when the Medo-Persians took Babylon and sent everybody home

-**What "simile" did Jeremiah use in v 1?** Jerusalem is like a widow

-**How was Jerusalem like a widow?** Deserted and alone

-**When was Israel the greatest among the nations?** During the reign of Solomon – the Queen of Sheba said: "The half has not been told"

-But there was a slow decline after that

**V2** – **How does Jeremiah picture Jerusalem?** Crying constantly; feeling betrayed by her lovers

-**Who were her lovers?** Her political allies, such as Egypt (not God)

-**What had her allies done at the time of the attack?** They had forsaken Israel – they were afraid of the Babylonians (a "lean mean fighting machine")

-In the book of *Jeremiah*, the kings of Israel were always going to foreign countries for help, instead of going to God

**V3** – **In what sense did Judah now dwell among the nations?** The Babylonians had slaves from many different countries – they were all mixed together in Babylon

-This was a real insult to the Jews

**V4** – **What else was Jeremiah sorrowful about?** The roads were empty, because no-one came to the appointed feasts

-**Why didn't anyone attend the religious feasts?** No temple anymore

-The gates to the city had been destroyed

-**Who rebuilt the gates and walls?** Nehemiah (read his book)

-**Why were the priests groaning, the virgins afflicted, and the people filled with bitterness?** The days of Solomon and his majesty were over

**V5** – They knew that this tragedy had come from the hand of God – he had caused their grief  
-**How wicked had Israel become?** Multitude of transgressions  
-**What had happened to the children?** Taken into captivity

**V6** – **What was the "majesty" of Jerusalem?** The days of Solomon and the majesty of the kings of the Southern Kingdom of Israel – it was all over  
-**How were the princes of Jerusalem like deer?** Like animals being hunted down

**V7** – **What was on the mind of the people (the survivors)?** They remembered the good days of Israel (as in the days of King David)  
-The days when their enemies fell before them  
-Hard question: **What book in the Old Testament is about the downfall of a nation because they made fun of the Jews at the fall of Jerusalem?** The book of *Obadiah*

## **Lamentations 1.8-11**

**V8** – Jeremiah does not "beat around the bush" – a characteristic of the prophet Jeremiah  
-**What was the cause of this catastrophe?** The sin of the people  
-Remember the laws of *Leviticus* about clean and unclean things (example: foods)  
-Now the nation of Israel is "unclean" ceremonially  
-**In what sense had the nations around Judah seen the "nakedness" of the people?** They had seen the true nature of the Jews

**V9** – The uncleanness of the nation was like the menstrual blood in the skirts of a woman  
-**How did Jerusalem come to such a low state?** They did not think about the future  
-Look at the immorality of the leadership of the U.S. today  
-The people say, "As long as the economy is good; as long as I have a job, and as long as I can pay my bills – then what the politicians do is their own business – it's OK with me"  
-But the leaders of the country are no more wicked than the people who elected them  
-Jerusalem has fallen "astonishingly"

**V10** – **What precious thing was removed?** The Ark of the Covenant (remember the "Indiana Jones" movies)  
-All the sacred bowls and utensils of the Levitical priests had been removed from the temple  
-**In what sense did the "nations" enter the sanctuary?** The Babylonians used mercenaries, slaves, anyone they could find to fight their battles for them  
-So Gentiles had gone into the temple and had destroyed it

**V11** – The people had given up all their precious things in order to have some bread to eat

## **Lamentations 1.12-19**

**V12** – **What upset Jeremiah about the fall of Jerusalem?** Nobody (outside the Jews) really cared – the country had become so wicked that the nearby nations had grown apathetic

- Jeremiah and the Jews who survived wanted sympathy – there was no pain like theirs
- Many of us have seen pictures of Germany at the end of World War II – the complete and utter destruction of many cities – only rubble left
- Who cannot feel sorry for situations like that?**
- See *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut, about the fire-bombing of Dresden, Germany, near the end of World War II – a frightful scene of mass destruction
- Another admission of the people that this destruction was from God and his anger

**V 13** – God sent "fire from heaven" to destroy the city

- How else did Jeremiah describe the city?** Like a net - the people were made faint

**V 14** – **How did Jeremiah describe the weight of sin?** Like a yoke upon the neck of the city

**V 15** – Interesting question: **Do wars just happen?** No – God rules over the nations of the world

- When a nation becomes too wicked, God uses other nations to put it down (See the book of *Habakkuk* – that is the theme of that book) – also see *Romans 13.1-7*
- And it doesn't matter how many strong men are defending the city or nation – God will overpower them
- What metaphor does Jeremiah use at this point?** They were put into God's winepress and trodden like grapes
- What New Testament writer picked up on this metaphor?** Apostle John
- Read Rev. 14.9-10**

**V 16** – **Read Jer. 9.1, 13.17, 14.17** – Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet

- The Holy Spirit is our comforter (*John 14-16*) – he comforts us today through the Word of God

**V 17** – **Any Messianic elements here?** Stretching out hands, no comfort ("*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*" etc.)

- The Lord was the one behind the fall of Jerusalem

**V 18a** – More confession of the sins of the people

- The Jews never again had a problem with idolatry and still don't today
- They were cured of idolatry once and for all
- In fact, they became fanatics on this subject
- When the Roman army marched into Jerusalem in the First Century, the Jews went wild with anger because of the eagle on the top of the standard for the army – they considered it idolatry
- v 18 is refreshing – they didn't try to blame anybody else – they knew they were guilty
- That is the first step to correcting the situation

**V 18b** – Hear now, all peoples – The theme of the book: Don't let what happened to us happen to you – don't let your country get so low morally that God will destroy it

**V 19** – **Who deserted the people?** "lovers" (foreign allies) and priests and elders of the city

## **Lamentations 1.20-22**

**V 20** – Describe the spirit of the people: very contrite – they knew they had been rebellious

**V 21** – Still a vengeful spirit – **Were the Edomites destroyed for their gloating over the fall of Jerusalem?** Yes

**Read Proverbs 24.17-28** – always good to keep in mind

-Even though God can bring about the destruction of a nation or an individual, we are not to rejoice, but we are to feel sorrow over what has happened – Not: "Hooray and hallelujah, you had it comin' to ya!"

**V 22** – Further confession of sin and sorrow in the hearts of the survivors – they had faith that things would work out eventually

### Questions for *Lamentations 1*:

1. **Describe the city of Jerusalem:** a city that had been destroyed
2. **Who brought this about?** God
3. **Why?** Because of the sins of the people
4. **Moral?** Learn from this event

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